

OXFORD

MAGAZINE

No. 447 Eighth Week Michaelmas Term 2022

Sunday 13th November, midway point of COP27 at Sharm el-Sheikh. In the *Observer* the lead story is the economic cost of Truss's disastrous budget several weeks earlier. There is ample coverage of the forthcoming "Autumn Statement" setting the new Sunak government's austerity agenda, the Qatar Football World Cup, the latest Ukrainian pushbacks on the Russians and the midterm elections in the USA as well as Matt Hancock's humiliating trials in "I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here".

But no mention of COP27 or the climate crisis. Biden and Sunak had already made their flying visits to COP.

Could it be that one reason for the absence of climate change in the news might be that 'Just Stop Oil' had paused their activism? The Just Stop Oil campaign, which included pouring soup over famous artworks and daily blocking of the M25, caused public outrage and general condemnation. An unfortunate man had had to miss his father's funeral and a policeman had been injured. Again and again we were told that climate change was indeed a problem requiring solution but that these activist methods were unacceptable because of the harm they cause. Some commentators did remark that the activists might one day be counted as heroic pioneers just like the Suffragettes (who bombed letter boxes, were force-fed when they went on hunger strike in prison, and in the case of Emily Davison died for the cause at the 1913 Derby). For a newly emerging alternative viewpoint see Rupert Read's article below.

A number of considerations were missing in the almost uniformly condemnatory media reporting and in interviews with activists. Those climbing onto gantries over the M25 or high over the Dartford Crossing suspen-

CLIMATE EMERGENCY – mutually assured destruction

sion bridge were actually putting *themselves* in real and considerable danger. Then they were liable to arrest, imprisonment and a criminal record, particularly relevant given that most of the protesters were young and already facing uncertain career paths. Seven hundred had been arrested by the time the campaign was paused. But the youthfulness of the activists was perhaps one of the most notable aspects, together with their all too obvious commitment and fear for the future. It is the

younger generation whose survival is at risk, not that of the politicians, the experts or media pundits. The rational position is indeed to be in terminal despair at the lack of action to address the universally recognised world problem of the climate crisis.

All of which hinges on the question; should such activists be condemned or admired for their courage and determination to attempt to force politicians into substantive action as, according to scientific evidence, we are on the threshold of the point of no return? No artwork was actually damaged. Meanwhile the police are exercising ever more draconian powers urged on them by the politicians, including detention of activists even before they have started their actions. The central consideration must be 'proportionality'. The right to protest protected under Human Rights legislation has to be balanced against the police's comprehensive powers to prevent any meaningful protest movement. Some argue that the Just Stop Oil methods of protest cannot be allowed because they equate to terrorism or could be used by any fanatical group intent on pursuing their particular cause. But what makes the climate protesters different and unique is that their aim is to achieve ends that all in society overwhelmingly wish to

INSIDE

● CLIMATE CHANGE
Pages four, six

● CONGREGATION
Page eight

● LITIGATION
Page ten

...and much more

be achieved. By their level of commitment such protests draw attention to the urgency of a situation which many find it most comfortable to ignore.

We seem to have forgotten the wild fires in London in July and August, not to speak of the recent flooding of one third of Pakistan. According to the World Meteorological Organization (August 2021): "Three of the costliest 10 disasters occurred in 2017: Hurricanes Harvey (US\$ 96.9 billion), Maria (US\$ 69.4 billion) and Irma (US\$ 58.2 billion). These three hurricanes alone accounted for 35% of the total economic losses of the top 10 disasters around the world from 1970 to 2019." Drought in 1983 is estimated to have caused 300,000 deaths in Ethiopia and 150,000 in Sudan; the Myanmar storm in 2008, 138,366. "[O]ver the period 2015 to 2017, 62 of the 77 [disaster] events reported show a significant human influence."

* * *

Could it be that COP27 was one massive exercise in mutual self-delusion? Its central outcome was an agreement to create a "Loss and Damage" fund. This fund appears to be a victory for countries most in need of support to rectify the damage caused by the mounting consequences of climate change, i.e. the poor world countries particularly affected by floods, droughts and other natural disasters. A degree of reality may have emerged. In so far as it has redesignated countries like China, India and Russia as "developed" rather than "developing" these wealthy and high-polluting countries will now contribute to the new fund. But Loss and Damage may be a convenient way of avoiding any notion of compensation for the historical responsibility of rich Western nations for the emissions causing climate change and it seems to replace the earlier – still unfulfilled – Paris promise of funds for developing countries to support mitigation and adaptation. No money is yet promised for Loss and Damage. Ironically Pakistan, as a country currently most deserving of Loss and Damage largesse, seemingly came away from COP27 with little or nothing.

As Antonio Guterres, UN secretary-general, said in his closing speech:

"Our planet is still in the emergency room, we need to drastically reduce emissions now – and this is an issue that Cop did not address. The world still needs a giant leap on climate ambition".

Alok Sharma the UK government climate minister and

COP26 President – who had ended up in tears at the end of the Glasgow meeting – evidently regarded COP27 as reneging on earlier intergovernmental agreements to work towards a 1.5°C warming target.

At COP27 a record number of delegates were representatives of the fossil fuel industries. This bizarre situation, which in itself tells you so much about the nature of COP meetings, is expected to be enhanced at COP28 to be held next year in the United Arab Emirates. Now the economic downturn is being used as a justification to licence new oil pumping.

Hardly surprising then that world attention has immediately switched comprehensively to the football.

* * *

The COP meetings involve nearly 200 governments speaking in the name of their countries to solve a uniquely difficult political as well as scientific challenge through mutual agreement. It is hard to imagine a worse way of doing things. Our own system of government is in many respects geared against achieving net zero. Policy on climate change is not even cross-party. Current government policy is inseparable from the narrow horizons of battery plants, fracking or onshore windfarms. But perhaps most limiting and determinative of all is the political imperative of the next election; there is every reason for government to speak softly, softly to the public on the true implications and ultimate outcomes of the climate emergency. The public does not want to hear – and perhaps pretends not to fully understand the consequences of the trends that are obvious enough in our own weather, quite apart from world weather-related disasters – while the only people with the power to act effectively do not want to lead.

Clearly the number of those young people prepared, able and brave enough to block motorways is limited. Other means of mass action for the affected younger generation are needed. A potentially important example has been set in the University of Barcelona. A seven-day student sit-in, supported by their lecturers, resulted in the university authorities agreeing to a obligatory course on climate change for all students and staff. One may have one's doubts whether compulsion is appropriate or indeed likely to be necessary, especially if the facts of the crisis are better and more openly explained in the first place. Ultimately the vast numbers of the young of this threatened generation will overcome the inertia of those in power.

B.B., T.J.H

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Tim Horder & Ben Bollig

The *Magazine* normally appears in Noughth, Second, Fifth and Eighth Weeks each Term.
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should be received by the Wednesday of the previous week.

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Jane Griffiths at Wadham

The suspension of *Oxford Magazine* publication throughout most of this term brought into question a number of considerations relating to the role and remit of the magazine. It has been argued that the place of the magazine in University affairs needs clarification; e.g., examination of its possible greater involvement in improving internal communication as the bedrock of our democratic governance principles.

This is clearly the ideal moment to establish our future plans. We are therefore inviting readers throughout the University to offer comments and suggestions, some starting points for which we, as current editors, outline below.

- As the complexity and constraints of working life in the University increase the magazine's most important role – as in its stated purpose, to promote “free expression of opinion within the University” – is perhaps to help to develop new, more modern and better ways of presenting and exchanging information on important policy developments in a timely way so that, for example, Congregation (as our sovereign democratic forum) can be in a better position to scrutinise and challenge policies being developed and proposed by Council and those serving it.
- As the range of opinions and voices increases across the enlarging University it becomes more difficult, but more important, to establish consensus; to this end *Oxford Magazine* has long sought to broaden

its content, especially to include contributions from staff whose voices are not easily heard. We already publish contributions from students and postgraduates. We need in particular to reach those fearful of the consequences of speaking out and in this regard we may need to publish anonymous articles. Inputs from senior administrators are necessary; how can it be made easier for them to respond to questions from our readers and answer legitimate criticisms?

- *Oxford Magazine* needs to be readily available to potential readers and its role recognised as widely as possible throughout the University; staff need to be alerted regularly to this publication (along with others involved in internal communication). What are our readers' views on, for example, the desirability of making print copies available in common rooms?
- One improvement might be to expand the editorial team; what suggestions can you offer by way of achieving this?

We invite all members the University to offer their views on the above – along with any additional proposals they may have – so that this unique publication, seemingly unmatched as an open forum for staff opinion-formation in any other university internationally, can thrive. Contact us at the addresses in the accompanying box.

Pebble

At the far end of the wide strand,
shifting banks of cobbles tumble,
rattle over scrambling feet;
at this end, scattered jewels stud
the gleaming sand, as the tide
withdraws.

The pebbles will dry
in seconds to salt-crusted grey,
just as fresh conkers surrender
that rich-grained gloss to shrivel
on my shelf.

I never learn, but choose
one pebble, to hold this day's cool
weight in my hand: a moment saved
that the sea cannot grind to sand.

Flute Practice

Some days, for no obvious
reason, one true note unfolds
soft petals to blossom, just
as it should, or four notes run
together, a silver stream
glimpsed for a moment
at the heart of the forest:
warm breath is pulsing steady,
unhurried, not spilling over
the flute in a wasteful, airy
hiss, but resonating within
the confines of cold metal
to release a human voice.

LOUISE WALKER

Louise Walker read English at Magdalen College and taught for over 30 years in girls' schools. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in anthologies by the Sycamore Press and Emma Press, as well as journals such as *Acumen*, *South*, *Foxglove Journal*, *ARTEMIS* and *Dreich*. Commissions include Bampton Classical Opera and she was Highly Commended in the Frosted Fire Firsts Award in 2022.

New moderate flank rising

RUPERT READ

Nothing's worked. Or, more diplomatically put, nothing has yet worked at anything like the pace required. Is it any wonder that desperation is growing, as a result?

The closest anything came to working was the April 2019 Extinction Rebellion. The radical flank of the environmental movement then punched a hole through complacency and denial; it raised climate consciousness, permanently. But it did not succeed in engendering commensurate real action from the state. And since that time the radical flank has not advanced in its effectiveness.

Governments the world over are simply not taking the findings of climate science seriously. It is why the blunt and terrible truth is that the world can no longer stay below the 1.5C 'safe' heating limit. And this year's United Nations climate summit, CoP27, has not changed anything except marginally. Deep down, everyone who pays any attention to the climate debate knows this.

Wouldn't it be refreshing therefore if academics, environmental and business leaders – even committed politicians, not to mention activists – were to *admit* that nothing yet has really worked? I believe that the public are waiting for those brave enough to speak these truths, and to invite a broad and popular response. But it won't happen anything like quickly enough if the public continue not to be trusted with the full reality of our situation.

I see this as the tragedy of the moment. Because it is frustrating the full emergence of so much energy and endeavour that will in my view become a new moderate flank that is all about *you*, where you work or in the communities where you live, acting directly to diminish climate damage. A few examples:

For lawyers, it's about what clients and what business you take; for insurers, it's about that and also about disclosing what you know about the rising threat we face; for academics and teachers, it's about that and how it informs your teaching and research; for those with access to land, it's about building resilience and inviting the community

at large – including those who you may not agree with politically – to join you.

It's about fully facing and sharing the desperate truth of the climate more-than-emergency, and acting on it where, along with others, you have most potential power in your life. In lieu of anything even remotely resembling adequate plans from our 'leaders', we need to put together an exit strategy from fossil fuels, or else we'll be ejected into the fossil record.

You're not sure what to do about it; I'm suggesting what we can all do about it.

The next big step forward in climate action must bring the public with us. We need together to step beyond the lures of polarisation, roll our sleeves up, and get down to business changing the operating system: so that it no longer resembles a conveyor belt to hell.

My challenge to the critics of Just Stop Oil is: if you don't like what they're doing, don't just carp; *do* something you judge to be better, something that actually is more positively effective. Do something along the lines perhaps of what the new moderate flank is calling for. When you do, *then* maybe our young people will start to feel a little less desperate.

My question to Just Stop Oil would be: Do you acknowledge the importance of the piece that we in the moderate flank are holding, which is that of *bringing the public with us*. Into positive action, from the ground-up.

My challenge to every reader who doesn't want to throw soup at anything... *join us*. Make it so. Make the new moderate flank a reality. It's too late to keep ourselves safe, but it's not too late to save ourselves from full-scale climate breakdown.

There's been no more important task in our whole history.

Rupert Read helped launch Extinction Rebellion. He now Co-Directs the Moderate Flank Incubator: www.moderateflank.org. His most recent book is 'Why climate breakdown matters', Bloomsbury Press. A shorter, earlier version of this article appeared in the Observer.

CLIMATE CHANGE LEADS TO MORE EXTREME WEATHER, BUT EARLY WARNINGS SAVE LIVES

In August last year the World Meteorological Organization published a Report, from which the following extracts are taken- eds

A disaster related to a weather, climate or water hazard occurred every day on average over the past 50 years – killing 115 people and causing US\$ 202 million in losses daily, according to a comprehensive new report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

The number of disasters has increased by a factor of five over the 50-year period, driven by climate change, more extreme weather and improved reporting. But, thanks to improved early warnings and disaster management, the number of deaths decreased almost three-fold.

According to the WMO Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water Extremes (1970–2019), there were more than 11 000 reported disasters attributed to these hazards globally, with just over 2 million deaths and US\$ 3.64 trillion in losses.

The report is the most comprehensive review of mortality and economic losses from weather, water and climate extremes to date. It assesses the entire 50-year period as well as by individual decade.

From 1970 to 2019, weather, climate and water hazards accounted for 50% of all disasters, 45% of all reported deaths and 74% of all reported economic losses.

More than 91% of these deaths occurred in developing countries (using the United Nations Country Classification).

Of the top 10 disasters, the hazards that led to the largest human losses during the period have been droughts (650 000 deaths), storms (577 232 deaths), floods (58 700 deaths) and extreme temperature (55 736 deaths).

Deaths decreased almost threefold from 1970 to 2019. Death tolls fell from over 50 000 deaths in the 1970s to less than 20 000 in the 2010s. The 1970s and 1980s reported an average of 170 related deaths per day. In the 1990s, that average fell by one third to 90 related deaths per day, then continued to fall in the 2010s to 40 related deaths per day.

With regard to economic losses, the top 10 events include storms (US\$ 521 billion) and floods (US\$ 115 billion).

During the 50-year period, US\$ 202 million dollars in damage occurred on average every day. Economic losses have increased sevenfold from the 1970s to the 2010s. The reported losses from 2010–2019 (US\$ 383 million per day on average over the decade) were seven times the amount reported from 1970–1979 (US\$ 49 million). Storms were the most prevalent cause of damage, resulting in the largest economic losses around the globe. It is the sole hazard for which the attributed portion is continually increasing.

Three of the costliest 10 disasters occurred in 2017: Hurricanes Harvey (US\$ 96.9 billion), Maria (US\$ 69.4 billion) and Irma (US\$ 58.2 billion). These three hurricanes alone accounted for 35% of the total economic losses of the top 10 disasters around the world from 1970 to 2019.

In Angel Square, Penrith

The square begins an inward-leading maze.
These are like shops from childhood, and the dead
Amble by key blanks, radishes, and children
With pads of paper. Grief recedes; instead

There comes an overpowering gratitude.
Those far-off days are gold within the air,
And tears start at the closeness of the past
Angelically transfiguring the square.

KIERON WINN

Kieron Winn's poems appear in magazines such as *New Statesman*, *The Spectator* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, and his first collection is *The Mortal Man* (2015): 'superb collection' (Agenda); 'the level of craft in these poems is a delight' (Clive James). He lives in Oxford and Penrith. In 2021 he was the first poet in residence at Rydal Mount since Wordsworth's time. See further kieronwinn.com

An engineer's thoughts after COP27

ORESTIS ADAMIDIS

In the 2015 Paris climate summit 'COP21', the world agreed to hold the "increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" and to pursue "efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C". Since 2015, scientific evidence consolidated in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 2018 demonstrated that a difference of 0.5°C in the temperature target, from 1.5°C to 2°C, corresponds to significantly increased hazard in terms of extreme weather events, droughts, and ecosystem survival. Thus, the goal of 1.5°C became the target for many organisations. There is broad agreement that to achieve 1.5°C, net emissions need to be cut to zero by 2050. In 2019, the British parliament passed legislation requiring the government to achieve net zero by 2050, and in 2021 a, Net Zero Strategy, document was published by the UK. The European Union also committed to net zero emissions by 2050 through the "European Green Deal", published in 2019. However, the world as a whole has not yet committed. One of the main aims of the British government for COP 26, hosted in Glasgow last year, was to keep the 1.5°C target alive. This was not achieved, nor was it this year in COP27. In fact, it is becoming increasingly unlikely that the 1.5°C target will be ever met. The world is already about 1.2°C hotter than it was in pre-industrial times and Britain's Met Office gives a 48% chance that global average temperatures will be 1.5°C higher than pre-industrial in at least one of the next five years. However, keeping the goal in place can act as a call for radical action. We need to rapidly implement unprecedented changes across all sectors of our economy to limit the damage from heating beyond 1.5°C.

Innovation is key in the effort to limit temperature rise. Without novel technologies, the task is destined to fail. All current temperature increase commitments are based on projections that include 'negative emissions'. Essentially, we are expected to extract CO₂ from the atmosphere efficiently and at scale, using carbon capture and storage technology that is not yet available. A range of biological and engineering strategies exist. Biological approaches include planting trees and increasing the carbon stored in the soil, while engineering approaches are targeted to directly capturing CO₂ from the atmosphere and storing it, typically in underground geological formations. Currently, we are assessing which techniques hold more promise in terms of deploying and scaling, as well as in terms of long-term CO₂ storage. Without significant and rapid development in this field, current projections will have to be adjusted for the worse.

Carbon capture is essential, but it is not sufficient to offset current levels of emissions. Emissions must be drastically slashed as a matter of urgency. To do so without dramatic effects on quality of life, engineering innovation is necessary. For instance, significant efforts are required to make the construction industry greener, as it currently

accounts for about 10% of emissions. Timber construction is having a renaissance due to its sustainability compared to steel and concrete, though much research is also dedicated to making concrete and steel production greener. Transportation is another sector that contributes significantly to carbon emissions. Research is underway regarding the best strategies towards greener mobility. A big part of the answer lies in reducing or avoiding the need for transportation altogether, by making cities denser and more walkable. The transition will not be easy: think of the changes required to make Oxford truly green by having people live close to where they need to be for work and leisure. Then, a shift from personal vehicles to public transport or non-motorised alternatives (e.g. bicycles) is needed. Public transportation will always be a greener option than a personal vehicle – even an electric one running on renewable energy, since carbon will be embodied during its manufacturing and disposal processes. The picture is completed with innovation towards alternative fuels like biogas, hydrogen, or electricity produced from renewable sources.

However, the biggest carbon contributor by far is energy production and use, accounting for about 70% of total emissions. Decarbonising the energy sector is recognised as critical and many countries consider the transition to renewable sources as a strategic goal. Developing renewables locally also fortifies energy security and thus targets for renewables are likely to be brought forward as an outcome of this year's war in Ukraine and the resulting energy crisis. Innovation is urgently needed for renewable energy infrastructure to meet the prescribed demand at a sufficiently low levelized energy cost (cost that covers construction and operation over the lifetime of a generator). The major sources of renewable energy include solar, wind, tidal, hydroelectric, and geothermal. As a result of scientific advancements, levelized energy costs for renewables have been consistently falling. Solar panels and onshore wind can already generate energy at a lower levelized cost than fossil fuels. However, much of the necessary renewable energy will need to come from offshore wind, an area in which the UK has been a pioneer. Every few years, a new generation of offshore wind turbine is deployed, each generation larger than the previous in order to increase efficiency and reduce the relevant levelized cost. The rotor diameter of an offshore wind turbine can be more than 220m (for comparison, the Gherkin at the City of London is 180m tall). Though size increases are necessary to make energy production more efficient, they produce significant challenges in design. For instance, the vast majority of offshore wind turbines are currently founded on 'monopiles', hollow steel piles driven into the seabed. Monopile behaviour is fundamentally different to that of piles that engineers are familiar with, as their diameter is larger than typical (current diameters are close to 10m), while their length to diameter ratio is much lower

than typical. Moreover, they are expected to withstand many millions of wind and wave loading cycles, as well as extreme weather events of increasing severity and frequency, while minimising the materials used. Much research is required to meaningfully answer these questions but little time is available since these systems are already being deployed. Within the next decade, research will need to provide design guidelines that allow a transition to floating wind turbine systems that are anchored at the seabed and can be deployed at deeper waters to better make use of wind energy potential.

Even with a rapid increase in the capacity of renewables, a major issue that remains is energy storage: energy demand does not coincide with times when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing. One potential currently investigated is the use of hydrogen as a way to store energy. It can be produced from electricity by the electrolysis of water, or from hydrocarbon systems. In the latter case, hydrogen can only be 'clean' if its production is combined with capturing the produced carbon and storing it. The hydrogen can be stored for a long time, likely in underground caverns, before being used again as fuel for piston engines, gas turbines, or hydrogen fuel cells, the latter offering the best efficiency.

Innovation in terms of carbon capture and emissions reduction is necessary to limit the effects of climate change, but it is not enough to prevent significant consequences to the environment. We are already experiencing the effects of climate change, including droughts, storms, cyclones, floods, and wildfires. These are projected to become more frequent and more severe. Additionally, as sea levels rise, new locations will become subject to erosion from sea waves and currents. Engineers are called to for-

tify infrastructure and increase the resilience of communities, often with insufficient resources. At a minimum, investment is needed to guarantee sufficient water storage, water supply and sanitation, flood and fire defences. Then, resources need to be allocated to fortify vital energy, transportation, and telecommunication networks. Finally, efforts should be made to increase the resilience of buildings and infrastructure in dense urban centres, where high population density leads to increased risk. Climate adaptation is extremely expensive (UN estimates that more than \$200bn a year are needed) and so priorities must be set. It is understood that areas will be left unfortified and a resulting climate change-led migration wave will be inevitable in the coming decades.

Given the necessary support, scientists and engineers can produce the innovative solutions that will lead us to net zero emissions, while building climate resilience. One is actually linked to the other, as the faster we reach net zero, the more limited the climate adaptation necessary. The effort will be monumental and will constitute the defining challenge for the engineers of our century. The goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C seems already lost but in the fight against climate change every fraction of a degree matters. The sooner the world realises the enormity and urgency of the task the better. At the conclusion of COP27, Alok Sharma, president of COP26, said:

"Emissions peaking before 2025: Not in this text. Clear follow-through on the phase down of coal: not in this text. A clear commitment to phase out all fossil fuels: not in this text."

COP 28 is planned for the end of 2023 in UAE. Better luck next time?

12 | YEARS | OLD

12 years old,
alone, with my mother,
I can see her face —
Doubt in outer space.

She used to keep the luckless,
caught beneath my feet.
She held the weight of hymn in halter,
n' kept us from the streets.

12 years old,
alone, with my mother,
I'm lying to myself;
back then, I missed my brothers,
I miss my brothers
still.

NIALL JAMES HOLOHAN

Niall James Holohan is an Irish writer-in-residence at Rua Red, Dublin. A dramatist by training, his interest lies in cross-genre experimentation. In 2022, his short story 'The Ballad of Diesel and Plum' was published in *The Oxonian* and he was the recipient of The Martin Esslin Society grant for drama at Keble College, Oxford.

Have you activated your membership of Congregation?

G.R.EVANS

The reappearance of the *Magazine* has been brought about by a Congregation Resolution. Such occurrences are rare but powerful acts of Congregation as the University's sovereign body. The (Congregation-made) Regulations for the conduct of business in Congregation include the provision that 'any twenty or more members of Congregation may at any time submit a resolution on any topic'. Faced with a Congregation Resolution the Council has to decide what to do. If it does not accept it, the matter goes to a meeting of Congregation for debate and voting. That is perceived as a risky decision, tending to encourage acceptance of the Resolution's proposals, as has happened this time.

A memorable earlier example was the Congregation Resolution of May 2005 when a Topic Discussion was called on the 'fundamental changes in the governance arrangements of the University' proposed in a Green Paper on *Oxford's Governance Structure*. An indignant Congregation Resolution in May 2005 called for postponement of consideration of this suggestion to Michaelmas Term. The Council was anxious to avoid a debate on that Resolution and agreed to the postponement. There followed months of energetic Congregation debate, with amendment and the final defeat of governance-change proposals in Michaelmas 2006.

The sovereignty of Congregation is easily lost sight of in the normal run of University business. *Gazette* after *Gazette* publishes Legislative Proposals for Congregation approval. For example the *Gazette* of 20 October contained several proposed amendments to Statute XIV. If these are formally objected to by two members of Congregation the matter comes to a meeting of Congregation for debate and voting, but that rarely happens. Usually the proposal is simply not controversial. Most often the new legislation is approved unopposed and the meeting of Congregation is 'cancelled'. But when Congregation awakens to concern or indignation it makes itself heard. Examples include the raising of undergraduate tuition fees, indignation about changes to the USS pension scheme and the EJRA*.

History records a similar pattern of periods of quiescence interrupted by sharp reminders of the democratic sovereignty of Congregation and its antecedents down the centuries. The appearance of limited engagement can encourage fresh calls for radical changes to the University's governance. In her Annual Oration in October 2022 the outgoing Vice-Chancellor spoke her mind on the subject. 'Getting a terrible F for "fossilized", is how the University governs itself'.

Her chief criticism was addressed to Congregation. Her listed indicators of its alleged inactiveness hinted at a limited awareness of the fundamental structure which is designed to allow a governing body of thousands to

operate without disrupting the conduct of executive business by the Council and its Committees, the Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellors. 'Meetings are rare and sparsely attended,' she said, 'and the highest postal ballot turnout in my tenure was about 1,600, on the EJRA'. She saw the burden on the administration as disproportionate when 'it takes only two members of Congregation to pose a question and require a meeting of Congregation' which 'requires the presence of 27 University staff and officers'. She was – unfairly – scathing about the emptiness of the Sheldonian at the meeting of October 12, 2020, not perhaps recognising that this was merely the formal occasion when the Question and the Council's published reply must be read aloud and Supplementary Questions put, but no debate is allowed.

'Participatory democracy requires participation,' she said, and 'if people are unwilling to participate then we ought to ask ourselves, why?' Indeed we should. Louise Richardson pointed out that 'many elections for Council and other University committees remain uncontested. Elected and unelected seats are often vacant as nobody wishes to take them. (132 lapsed vacancies at last count.)'. However that seems to be a comment on the burden of engaging in active committee work rather than on the operation of Congregation, since it includes the unelected *ex officio* members of a wide variety of bodies.

Her most strongly-felt criticism was an allegation that potential members of Congregation simply could not be bothered to take up their membership. 'About 9,000 members of our community are eligible for membership of Congregation; about 5,500 choose to join', she said. But eligible new employees report that no one told them they had to ask in order to be made members of Congregation. It would not be automatic.

The information about eligibility is easy enough to find, but a new employee would need to look it up in the Statutes and Regulations. Statute IV, 3 lists those qualified by a named post held, plus at (9):

(9) any other persons or classes of persons admitted by or under regulations made by Congregation

These are the Congregation Regulations 1 of 2002, 1, which specify the 'persons and classes of persons' who are 'qualified for membership of Congregation under the provisions of section 3 (9) of Statute IV'. Those listed include (10) 'all persons working in any university department or institution who hold posts on, or assessed as equivalent to, grades 8 and above' and (11) 'such other persons as Council shall determine'.

Do you know whether you are a member of Congregation? The latest Annual list is in Supplement (I) to *Gazette*, 24 March, 2022. You can check there and if your

name does not appear, ask the appropriate person to confirm your standing. The list gives a total of 5423 so if indeed there are 9,000 employees at Grade 8 and above, that suggests a good many do not know they could be contributing to Congregation Resolutions, asking Congregation Questions, objecting to prompt debating and voting. The published list gives names alphabetically, with college or department as appropriate, but not indication of category of eligibility.

Surely it is of the first importance to ensure that new or promoted employees understand that they need to ask? The *Gazette* publishes the names of a few new members of Congregation week by week, and perhaps those have been encouraged by a line manager. But it seems unlikely to be the case that thousands have considered asking for the franchise and decided not to bother.

The Vice-Chancellor ended her Oration with the suggestion that 'as Oxford moves forward to become an ever-more modern institution, it would be good to think that its mode of governance might adapt'. That has of course been tried, most recently in the attempt by John Hood as Vice-Chancellor to bring it about. But before 'modernisation' tries to remove sovereignty from Congregation perhaps an amendment of Congregation Regulations should be made, to require employees at Grade 8 and above to be told to ask for Congregation membership?

* Since the governance battle which began in 2005 debates are always published verbatim in a *Supplement* to the *Gazette*, and that places what is said on the historical record.

How to initiate Congregation actions

How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22nd day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8th day before the meeting.

Questions and replies

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18th day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

Postal votes

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present ("on the floor") at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

Flysheets

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>

Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.

The Congregation website is at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation.

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NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

Possible ‘group litigation’: claims of £100m by 20,000 students

DAVID PALFREYMAN

There has been a lot of class-action litigation in the USA as students sue their universities, seeking partial refunds/reductions in fees because Covid disruption altered the means of teaching delivery from F2F to online (the latter allegedly being inferior or at least supposedly cheaper to provide) and also over restricted access to campus facilities during Covid shutdowns. Such litigation has so far been generally unsuccessful given that courts have not been able to identify an express term in the cloudy and skimpy university-student contracts to educate that specifically promised F2F teaching. Thus, only a few cases have resulted in a university having to refund particular fees concerning accommodation, campus travel plans, campus catering, campus recreation facilities, etc, where access to campus life was curtailed – and which inexplicably they had hitherto refused to refund! A few more claims have been referred back from the appeal courts where it seemed that an implied term of F2F teaching might be discerned amidst the stuff supplied to students and especially where the university already ran an online version of the degree course that carried a lower tuition fee so there was a benchmark as to how the online version cost less than the F2F version.

And now (as at November 2022) the possibility of such class-action litigation has arrived in the UK – subject to the High Court at a hearing scheduled for February 2023 approving a ‘group-litigation’ bid based on, it appears, some 3500 students and former students at UCL as a test case for what might be 20,000 students and former students across some 18 Russell Group universities. There is media talk of each claimant getting an expected average payout of £5k – so a potential class-action claim for £100m (sic), with the no-win/no-fee law firms taking 35% of the winnings. The universities named include: UCL, LSE, KCL, Manchester, Birmingham, Warwick, Nottingham, Cardiff. Some of that hoped-for £5k might also be for lost teaching as a result of the strike action at certain campuses over the past year or so, as well as perhaps an amount as ‘disappointment damages’.

Joining the group action is free and easy via the website – StudentGroupClaim.co.uk – and recent media publicity may well see that number of 20,000 increase significantly. And other universities may yet be drawn in. The website’s FAQs page seems to suggest that there is no need for the claimant first to have exhausted internal complaints procedures and then also a referral to the OIA – the High Court might yet take a different view? The OIA is supposedly circumvented on the basis that it will not address an issue of whether online provision of teaching is of lower quality than F2F since that would engage ‘academic judgement’ as territory excluded by the OIA’s founding statute (and, of course, the courts also normally do not

second-guess academic judgement). The claim appears to be for ‘breach of contract and trust’ in that ‘promises’ within the university-student contract have, supposedly, not been fulfilled – ‘promises’ presumably of F2F teaching and of the full campus experience – as universities resorted to online or later hybrid teaching and as students stayed at home or were isolated in halls with libraries, gyms, bars, refractories, and other campus facilities shuttered.

Yet if breach of contract by way of different teaching delivery and non-access to facilities is the issue, rather than a matter of judging whether online teaching is pedagogically inferior to F2F delivery, then such a complaint is surely within the remit of the OIA and hence, as noted, the Court might expect the OIA route to have been utilised prior to litigation – and, just as with any litigation, the Court might also expect a try at mediation. Indeed, the OIA has already adjudicated on a similar claim by 20 students at KCL – finding it ‘not justified’. And, while universities might not be able to fend off any group litigation by invoking a force majeure clause (frowned on by the OIA), they might – having first called for use of the OIA as above – seek to argue that there has anyway been ‘substantial performance’ (teaching was delivered albeit in an unfamiliar form, examining and assessment happened, and degrees were duly awarded), as well as perhaps asserting that students were anyway notified in the run-up to 20/21 of proposed changes to teaching delivery and by returning or commencing they accepted the amendment of the contract by way of specific reference to online or hybrid delivery of teaching. They might also assert that after all the vague contract has no express term about the form of teaching delivery – and that there are no implied ‘promises’ to be inferred from all the paraphernalia of course handbooks etc. As for the strikes component of any claims, the universities might point at the OIA’s award of some £150 per week of lost T and simply offer to settle at that?

All that said, the incentive of a 35% no-win/no-fee share of a potential £100m pot of damages will mean the group-litigation’s lawyers will put in a lot of high-grade legal effort, while the threat of a very costly payout doubtless means the collective of universities will fund equally hefty lawyer fire-power. Assuming group-litigation is permitted and assuming there does not have to be a mass referral to the OIA, we may yet get, as the claim reaches the Court of Appeal or even the UKSC, the needed clarification on the exact nature of the university-student contract to educate as a B2C (business to consumer) contract covered by the Consumer Rights Act 2015 – and, wow, perhaps at last the introduction of a clear, comprehensive, robust, and fair standardised contract (see OxCHEPS Occasional

Why is an Oxford College's name found in George Eliot's 'Middlemarch'?

RICHARD BOYD

Warwickshire was the pivot of her early life: Oxford then (she was born Mary Ann Evans in 1819) certainly wasn't a town the equal of Nuneaton for the future George Eliot. However Eliot's own career must, even in Oxford, have been noted as it proceeded from translator, to literary critic, to editor, and thence to novelist. She was Queen Victoria's favourite writer it was said, and still now is considered one of the 'greats'.

"But doesn't Eliot see life too much through rose-tinted spectacles?" an Oxford philosopher asked me 60 years ago during the Entrance Interview. 'Middlemarch' I had said in reply to his enquiry as to what then I was reading. The Warden of Merton was elderly, small, rotund; and unbeknown to me he had fought in the trenches in World War 1. A moral philosopher whose experiences there must have altered the tincture, the timbre, of his own spectacles.

What a surprise then it was to me, recently, when revisiting that 1871/2 masterwork to read, and note with astonishment, the word (it occurs twice, on different pages though in the same chapter) 'Brasenose'. Brasenose? That somewhat 'middle of the road' Oxford college?; the one with a funny name?; the one with a reputation for friendly sportiness and Cheshire connections?

The context for Eliot's use of 'Brasenose' is interesting. It concerns scholarly failure. Mr Casaubon is the first husband of the book's heroine, the much younger Dorothea. Casaubon's life work will, he suddenly realises, be found

wanting 'by Brasenose and a less formidable posterity'. He becomes petrified by what really will be thought of his "Key to all Mythologies", of his pamphlets, by 'the leading minds of Brasenose'. Eliot, using Brasenose as a benchmark, devastatingly recounts her pedant's loss of nerve.

Why might she have chosen Brasenose? I suspect that it is Walter Pater (1839-1894) whom we must look to. Pater became a Fellow of Brasenose in 1864 and Eliot is likely to have become aware of his rising star as essayist and scholar – one with an unusual strength in then being able to teach modern German philosophy. However within a year of publication of *Middlemarch* she went on to regard Pater, as he became the standard bearer for Aestheticism, with critical hostility. However, before then, in her letters and diary for 1867 she writes of a visit to Oxford (she and her 'husband' stayed in the Rector's Lodgings at Lincoln College), a visit during which Mark Pattison had drawn her attention to the young Pater walking across High Street in front of them.

Was it Pater, subliminally, who encouraged Eliot's flowing pen to use the word 'Brasenose'? Indeed might the very obscurity of the name have fitted with Casaubon's mental discomfort? Yet how odd for that College to find itself embedded within this wonderful work. Unexpected certainly; unwarranted perhaps by the reality of its formidable 'scholarly' posterity?

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Neoliberalism

ROGER BROWN

British, and especially English, higher education has undergone major changes over the past 30 or so years. Most controversial was the introduction of full-cost fees for most courses. But this may have distracted attention from the separation of research funding from teaching funding (and the associated concentration of research funding); the introduction of loans for both students' living costs and tuition; the huge increase in the number and range of institutions with degree awarding powers and university title; the removal of enrolment limits; and the introduction of a more intrusive, and even draconian, regulatory regime. As a result, the provision of British higher education approaches more closely to a market than in any other major developed country with the important exception of the US private sector (for which – or at least the associated riches – some institutional leaders still hanker).

The extent, meaning and impact of these changes may still not be sufficiently well appreciated, even within the sector (if indeed it is still useful to speak in those terms). When the present writer first became involved in higher education policy in the mid-80s most of the costs of teaching were still being met by direct state subsidies; research selectivity was in its infancy; there were grants to cover students' living costs (and indeed the shift to loans divided Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet); access to degree awarding powers and a university title was closely guarded (the polytechnics were only just emerging from local authority ownership); student numbers were closely controlled; and although what was called 'teaching quality assessment' was introduced at the end of the decade, self-regulation was still the order of the day, and indeed the universities had created an audit unit in an attempt to protect it. Certainly, no one could have imagined that an external system regulator might be contemplating fining institutions offering too much online teaching. Finally, whilst the Government was increasingly enthusiastic about universities' links with business, higher education was still seen generally as a public good with the fundamental purpose of developing students' capacity to learn and think through teaching and exposure to research and scholarship.

In his recently published book (see below), the present writer reviews these changes and shows how closely aligned they are to Neoliberal thinking: that markets are the best means of generating and allocating resources; where they cannot be privatised, institutions fulfilling public purposes should be exposed to as much competition as possible; the costs of goods and services should be met by those who consume them (hence the introduction of a student voucher system of the kind first advocated by the arch Neoliberal economist Milton Friedman); and regulation should focus on enhancing information for consumers and removing unnecessary barriers to market entry by potential competitors.

The basic idea is that the individual is a piece of capital to be expanded and developed like any other piece of capital. To quote Wendy Brown:

...neoliberalism extends from the management of the state itself to the soul of the subject: it renders health, education, transportation, nature and art into individual consumer goods, and converts patients, students, drivers, athletes

and museum-goers alike into entrepreneurs of their own needs and desires who consume or invest in those goods (Brown, W., 2011).

In his analysis, the present author identifies two main sets of detriments associated with these Neoliberal reforms of British higher education.

First, higher education is reduced to being just another vehicle for capital accumulation. So, for example, institutions and subjects are judged primarily on their graduates' earnings and employment outcomes. Second, the higher education market (or quasi-market) reinforces, and even exacerbates, existing resource and status differentials between institutions, subjects and courses. This is not a surprise. Markets are supposed to create winners and losers. But as previously argued in these pages¹, markets are particularly problematic in higher education because of the problem of specifying quality. This means that, like consumers in other markets without direct product information, students and their advisers resort to proxies, and the one they fall back on is institutional status and resourcing (usually co-related). This then reinforces the differentials as well, ironically, as punishing innovation.

However this is not the end of the story. Based on an analysis of the development of Britain and the US since 1945, the present writer argues that these Neoliberal policies and reforms were in fact the means by which conservative political parties and forces – the Conservatives, the Republicans – reacted against the Welfare State and the New Deal. These in turn were successful attempts to disperse the concentrations of wealth and power (or at least to tackle the detriments) that characterised both societies before and immediately after the First World War.

This long period from the late 20s to the early 70s, often described as Keynesian, was brought to an end by the first oil crisis, of which radical conservatives in both countries (and not only in the political parties) took full advantage. The main consequences of this conservative counter-revolution were a massive increase in inequality and poverty and a severe reduction in economic growth and stability, what the US economist and former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers famously called 'secular stagnation'. The main beneficiaries have been the wealthy, big business and finance (the City, Wall Street).

With the current popular resistance to public spending cuts, there are some grounds for thinking that this period of reaction may now be drawing to a close. But with our experience of Neoliberal 'reforms' it would be very helpful if higher education, or at least those who claim to lead it, could show the rest of us the way.

¹ 'Contracts for all' *Oxford Magazine* Fifth Week, Trinity Term, 2022.

Brown, R. (2022) *The Conservative Counter-Revolution in Britain and America* Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan

Brown, W. (2011) Neoliberalized knowledge. *History of the Present* 1 (1) pp. 113-129.

REVIEWS

Lucky Tom

Hermione Lee, *Tom Stoppard: A Life* (Faber & Faber, 2020) £30.



Tom Stoppard is a major dramatist. The final scene of *Arcadia* (1993) is one of the best theatrical experiences I have ever had, and I have vivid memories of the televised *Professional Foul* (1977). What show being broadcast now will be remembered in 2067? Peter Barkworth's Professor Anderson was one of the most plausible impersonations of an academic I have ever seen.

Hermione Lee's biography is a full evocation of the man and artist, and will be a quarry which will be mined by other authors for years to come. But. There's always a but. You don't really read quarries, especially when they are 977 pages long; they are places you mine. There's no entry for 'textual criticism', but one could construct an essay on relation between text and performances – leading one to the conclusion that Shakespearean scholarship in this area is often on a hiding to nothing. As I was reading I was inwardly yelling, 'But I don't need to know this!' A cricket score is provided at one point. Still, at least the Number plates of his cars are not given – this should only apply in a biography of Gerald Nabarro. The problem is famously identified by Henry James: 'Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.' In this biography we don't learn that Benjamin Whitrow, who played Ruskin in the original production of *The Invention of Love*, is the father of Celia Imrie's love-child, and why should we? But we could.

As one reads the perennial questions involving literary biographies come up: what are they for? and who are they for? At a basic level to establish dates and places, and put the career into some kind of order. More ambitiously to explore the elusive inner workings of a writer and explain how the works came into being. Stoppard is sceptical of biography, and he has Oscar Wilde say in *The Invention of Love* that biography 'is the mesh through which our real life seeps.' Any biography then will only go so far. The classic treatment of the disjunction between the diurnal person and the writer is Henry James's superb 'The Private Life', where the writer (based on Browning) socialises while his secret double is writing in another room, in the dark. For any literary creator, and especially a poet, there is, as Yeats put it in 'A General Introduction for My Work', a mystery:

'A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks as someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria.'

I thought of this passage as I was reading about Stoppard at breakfast on p. 248 and p. 773. I was inwardly yelling why this?, then wondered whether I should be giving Lee the benefit of the doubt and accept that she had the Yeats in mind and hoped her readers would have it too. She knows the passage, since she quotes it in her *Biography: a Very Short Introduction* (2009). The mystery of the phantasmagoria, is a mystery to Stoppard himself. There was a time when, if he or she played one's cards right, a biographer could take Freudian analysis from the deck, but that flush is now largely busted.

Lee is good at offering critiques of the works. One salient fact about Stoppard is well represented by her: that he is one of those artists who relishes words, and realises that this will be a substantial base for creation. He is in a long tradition. Here is Dennis Stone in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow* (1921):

'That's the test for the literary mind,' said Denis; 'the feeling of magic, the sense that words have power. The technical, verbal part of literature is simply a development of magic. Words are man's first and most grandiose invention. With language he created a whole new universe; what wonder if he loved words and attributed power to them! With fitted, harmonious words the magicians summoned rabbits out of empty hats and spirits from the elements.' (Chapter 20).

And then there is W.H. Auden in 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', saying that Time:

*Worships language an forgives
Everyone by whom it lives;
Pardons cowardice, conceit,
Lays its honours at their feet.*

Disgracefully, Auden cut these lines in the edition of *Collected Shorter Poems* (1966). Stoppard often stresses the inventive possibilities of words cut adrift from plausibility and possibility. This can lead to detachment from reality, and an affiliation to the nonsense and absurdist tradition which includes Carroll, Ionesco, Beckett, The Goon Show and Monty Python. Wilde even. Stoppard's 'Foot of the Yard' in *After Magritte* is pure Goon Show. This tradition can be entertaining, but one is sometimes left with the feeling 'so what?' Stoppard began his career in journalism, which, in theory, should have given him a firm basis in facts, but that's not necessarily the case. Reporters convert news into entertaining fiction, with a whole repertoire of creative phrases, such as 'love-nest' and 'lover-rat'. Headlines especially are inventive. It's language freed from the world, and that has been his speciality. He was a motoring correspondent even though he couldn't drive; still, it stood him in good stead later since was able to explain that negotiating the perilous inclines of wokedomery was like double-declutching. People often complain about obscurity in Stoppard, but don't bat an eyelid when a hefty chunk of Dantesque Italian appears in Ridley Scott's *Hannibal* (2001). Stoppard, though, has changed, and become more open to emotion and seriousness, especially in *Leopoldstadt*, which draws on his late realisation of his Jewish inheritance – concealed for years by his mother. Lee deals with this in great and commendable detail.

A word dominating the biography is 'luck'. Stoppard has been very lucky. He was born Tomáš Stráussler in what was then Czechoslovakia. When Hitler invaded in 1939, the Stráusslers fled to Singapore, where his father had been offered a post in a hospital. When the Japanese army arrived in February 1942, the family had to take flight once more. He, his mother Marta and his brother Peter escaped on a boat that was about to leave and they ended up in Bombay. The father was to follow, but he never did, since the Japanese sank the ship he was travelling on. After further wanderings around India, the Stráusslers ended up in Darjeeling, where the boys went to an English school. Marta met and later married an English officer, Major Kenneth Stoppard, who brought the whole family to England in 1946. Tom Stoppard became an Englishman. Cecil Rhodes said, 'You are an Englishman. That means you have drawn the first prize in the lottery of life.' It's quoted twice. I don't know how long the luck lasted precisely, but in *Lessons* Ian McEwan claims it was still going when Roland Baines, born in 1948, 'loll[ed] on history's aproned lap... eating all the cream.' The novelist Robert Harris has said, 'I was born in the 1950s), which is to have won God's lottery.' He was born in 1957 – after that the luck began to run out. In addition there is the luck of consciousness. In *Lessons* McEwan speaks of 'the brief privilege of consciousness' and 'the pure luck of consciousness'. We all have that, but some appreciate it more than others.

For Stoppard an early piece of luck was to attend Okeover school in Staffordshire, which must have been in the back of his mind when he wrote *Arcadia*. He refers to it as ‘a corner of Derbyshire’ – which sounds better than Staffordshire.



Okeover Hall, Staffordshire: real Arcadia – except that it’s unreal, because the picture shows a house not yet built, and never to be built to this design. Arthur Devis (1712-1787): Leak Okeover, Rev. John Allen and Captain Chester; (1745-1747).



Okeover Hall, Staffordshire.

Another early piece of luck was his employment in Bristol, which at the time was just the right environment. He regrets not having been to Oxford: ‘oh to be reading classics at Oxford when 21’, but that might not have done him much good. There is one sense, though, in which like everyone of his age he has not been lucky. He has had the misfortune to live into a time when the England fought for in World War 2 has disappeared, and a species of mass ignorance and amnesia has taken over. He regrets that now one can’t guarantee an audience knowing who Goneril is (p. 586) and that one needs ‘a typeface for banter’ (p. 822), although something like this happened earlier when he met a stupid Sean Connery and said to the late David Cornwell (‘John le Carré’, ‘I think I shall have to find a new typeface for irony’ (p. 499). Now that the Queen is dead the virtues associated with her will gradually diminish: duty, dignity, discreet demeanour, deference, and her Britain will fade into the past.

There’s another misfortune lying in wait for people who become famous, summed up in John Wain’s comment to me: ‘Up and down the country there are 365 people who want just one day of your time.’ Stoppard has succumbed to all sort of demands, so that one wonders how he gets any work done. One’s head spins as the names and duties come thick and fast. His broad involvement is summed up in the monster party he throws in the Chelsea Physick Garden for friends and acquaintances. The one in 2013 cost £118,000 (about £135,000 in today’s money). Craig Raine writes to me: ‘Once, caviar: when I told George Christie, he and Mary ran towards the stall. Too late, as I remember.’ Nicholas Hytner wrote, ‘Any garden that contains Ronnie Wood and Alfred Brendel is one I want to be in!’ Also he is much more hands-on in productions of his plays than other dramatists, often to the annoyance of directors. Often as I was

reading Yeats’s ‘The Fascination of What’s Difficult’ ran through my head:

My curse on plays

That have to be set up in fifty ways,
On the day’s war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.
I swear before dawn comes round again
I’ll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

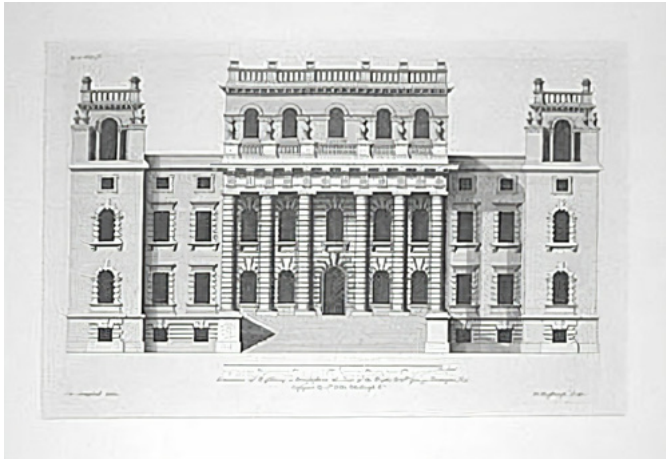
We know what he looks like. He looks like Mick Jagger. When Philip Larkin collided with Stoppard at a party at No. 10, the wife of Anthony Powell ‘whispered to me, “Is that Mike Jagger?”’ and I was able, from the wealth of my infinitely greater savoir vivre, nous, sens d’occasion and what not, to put her wise.’ (letter to Anthony Thwaite, 14 October 1980). This priceless nugget is not in Lee. When Stoppard was working on the film *Enigma* he and Jagger walked into a Bletchley pub, and a witness noticed ‘the stunned silence’ – explained, I imagine, by the locals trying to work out which was which. A very Stoppardian moment of doubles. We know what he sounds like, because there are a number of available interviews – in which he comes across as intelligent and efficiently communicative. And we know about his personal relationships, especially if we followed the tabloids over the years. We know what Miriam Stoppard and Felicity Kendal look and sound like. These are the perils of living at a time when information is so readily available, and so permanent.

Is he a nice man? Yes, which is a relief, because usually biographies of literary folk expose them as shits. He passes W. H. Auden’s test of never ‘becoming involved in a bar-room fight’ He is considerate to lowly employees. That’s always a good sign. One thinks of Clough, writing to Blanche Smith to explain that he had not gone out for a social visit, because it was raining ‘cats and dogs’ and ‘I did not like sending out the man to get wet through in finding a cab.’ (28 March 1852). He pay his debts, and is nice to old people. Such as Drue Heinz, (1915-2018!) – although I suppose it helped that she was a millionairess. He was nice to an elderly Peggy Ashcroft too. He has been good with his children, and his exes seem to speak well of him. At the same time though he has a firm will, as do many artists, and his legendary charm is a means of keeping people at bay.

There’s almost everything one could possibly wish to know in this biography – except where his latest house is. Lee tells us it is built from material recycled from ‘a demolished Vanbrugh [not indexed] house in deepest Dorset countryside,’ and that, to venture in Pevsnerese for moment, it is ‘made of “banded flint and ashlar”’, but fails to spill the beans on where it is, or what the demolished house was. I suppose she does not want to expose him to invasive fans, although I have no such worries, because so few people will be reading this. A click or two of the mouse reveals all. It is The Rectory in Tarrant Gunville, and the Vanbrugh building was the enormous Eastbury House (not to be confused with Eastbury House in Barking), mostly demolished at the end of the eighteenth century. There is a possible Stoppardian theme here. Those bands makes it look like streaky bacon. It is reasonably modest for someone who has so much money. Still, it is very nice. Oh, Lucky Tom, how we envy him!



The Vicarage, Tarrant Gunville.



Eastbury House, designed by Joh Vanbrugh.

There is a lot of tedium, but it is relieved from time to time by laugh-aloud moments, or smirky moments. A remark he made, 'I am assuming nothing' was reported as 'I am a human nothing' – and this resurfaces from time to time. There was a read-through of *Jumpers* at Kenneth Tynan's house. At the end 'Olivier sat gazing thoughtfully up at the ceiling and, when Stoppard had ground to a halt, he said, after a very long pause, "Ken, where did you get that light?"'. I like, 'The only polysyllable word tolerated in Hollywood is delicatessen.' Lee says it's a 'bad joke'. I should have thought it was a good joke. When watching a film while crossing the Atlantic he said that it was so bad 'that people were walking out at 35,000 feet.' It would be nice to know what the film was. It's quite amusing to hear that Lew Grade couldn't perhaps distinguish between Eugene Onegin and The Onedin Line. Ditto the moment when Stoppard described *The Real Thing* as 'very close Shavian', and the moment when asked to explain 'plangent' during a rehearsal Mike Nicholas said, 'Fucked if I know!' A quarrel between Stoppard and Sean Connery over the star's sore throat led Stoppard to say, 'He is confusing different parts of his anatomy. Connery paid up because he didn't have a leg to stand on.' Richard Eyre remembers Stoppard turning to him after a woman gushed about his work in New York and saying, 'Why don't they ever offer you a blow job?' I don't see eye to eye with Lee on the 'joke' in *Shakespeare in Love* where a boatman says 'he had had that Christopher Marlowe in his boat once'; it's not that it's not funny, it's not even a joke. It's a crass and obvious piece of writing, enabling audiences to congratulate themselves that they get it. Alas, the film got a Golden Globe award in 1999, and in his acceptance speech, after Marc Norman's excessively long spouting, Stoppard said, 'In my country, when you hear the words Wrap It Up, it means your flies are open.' That at least was funny. While we are on spouting, Lee mentions Gwynnie's 'tearful' acceptance speech at the same event. You can see it on the internet, but only between interlaced fingers; I should have said it was more like disgraceful blubbing. A moment or two later in his acceptance speech Stoppard told the audience not to clap 'or they'll play the music.' Julian Barnes tells of a droll moment when after a lot of name-dropping during a lunch in 2010 he says to Stoppard that he will drink some claret 'Only if it comes from Paul McCartney.' There's a very Stoppardian moment in Russia when an actor says that a piece of pink sliced meat is 'language'. 'Language! I love it!' said Stoppard. It was tongue. When Pinter won the Nobel Prize, Stoppard had not heard about it, but had heard about him having a bad fall. 'He rang up Antonia, very concerned: "Antonia, I've just heard the news and I'm horrified. I'm absolutely horrified, I just thought I should ring you straight away." Antonia said "Oh, are you very upset?"' Pinteresque that. Stoppard dined with Kenneth Tynan and Freddy Ayer in New College ('food dreadful'). I wonder if he encountered the little wooden railway in the SCR, which used to ferry the decanters across the fireplace? A delightfully Stoppardian piece of whimsy. I understand it has been axed, but confined, I hope, to the archive rather than a skip.

He has wasted his time on a lot worthless projects. Antonia Byatt

sent him a letter telling him to read Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*. He said he might not manage it before he died. I'd recommend that he did, and he might even be tempted to produce a film-script, which would be a better a project than some of the pap he has been involved in. And it's even Stoppardian, with the divided Princess and the divided Hyacinth Robinson. Don't suppose he'll read this review though.

The index is no good. Lots and lots of figures don't make it; here is just a selection: Spiro Agnew, Matthew Arnold, David Bellamy, James Bowman, Barbara Cartland, Charlotte Church, Grey Dyke, Pierre de Fermat, George Galloway, Thomas Girtin, George Gissing, Kenneth Grahame, Hugh Grant, Germaine Greer, Wayne Hays (the American Congressman who employed his mistress Elizabeth Ray as his secretary even though she couldn't type), Paul Hecht, Benjamin Jowett, Gustave Klimt, Wyndham Lewis, Vera Lynn, Gustave Mahler, Roger Norrington, Walter Pater, Francis Picabia, Roman Polanski, Marcel Proust, John Profumo, Magnus Pyke, Mandy Rice Davies, Cliff Richard, John Ruskin, Arnold Schoenberg, Maurice Sendak, Donald Sinden, Janet Suzman, Jeremy Thorpe, John Varley and Alan Whicker. Raine Spencer ('acid Raine') does not make it, although she did make it to the seat next to Václav Havel for the Royal Court production of *Rock and Roll*. We shall allow the imagination to boggle for a moment. Susan Sontag and Robert Lowell shared a lift with Stoppard, but don't make it to the index. Even Terence Stamp doesn't make it, and yet he's the uncle of his daughter-in-law. It's not just people who are missing but things like *The Black and White Minstrel Show*, *Z Cars*, *M*A*S*H* (remember that?) and *Cathy Come Home*, and, more importantly, *The Goon Show*. Dick Barton Special Agent is not there; it was taken off in 1951 and, much to my eternal chagrin, replaced at that evening slot by the perpetually dire *The Archers*.

There aren't many mistakes. On p. 568 Lee refers to three obscure writers who appear in Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*: 'Clarke, Hewson and Kenney'. However there aren't three but two: James Kenney (1780-1849) (who, pace OED, might be responsible for the word 'diddle' (swindle)), and Hewson Clarke (1787-1845?), described in a note to the Second Edition as 'a sad dog', who attacked Byron in *The Satirist* and wrote an amusing poem about his bear in Trinity College, Cambridge. Stoppard has made mistakes, as when he referred to an 1897 Delaunay-Belleville (p. 48). The company was not founded until 1903. Sometimes things might need a bit of explaining. Stoppard makes a 'Larkinesque prayer' for his son (p. 315). This is a reference to Larkin's 'Born Yesterday', which, following on from Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter', asks for ordinariness for Sally Amis, rather than spectacular beauty. Alas, the prayer for Sally was not answered.

Hermione Lee says that when Stoppard dies that he will become his admirers (an allusion to Auden's 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats'), and his creative work will be the principal enabler of this – although her biography will make a contribution. I end where Lee ends, with the evocation of the famous Nevill Coghill production of *The Tempest* in Worcester College Gardens in 1949 (not 'the late 1950s'). This was when Ariel ran across the lake, on boards anchored just below the surface. Stoppard referred to this essentially theatrical moment as an example of something that goes beyond writing. But did he actually see it? Would his school have carted him all the way from Staffordshire? Lee does not tell us, but in an interview Stoppard admitted that he had only heard about it. Productions at Worcester College tend to take advantage of the lake. My partner was a fairy in Daphne Levens's production there of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1955. She and her friends emerged from the reeds and the duck poo with illuminated wands. Up until recently she still had her wand – although the battery no longer worked.

BERNARD RICHARDS

Speaking with authority

Lucy Newlyn, *Quicksilver*, Belfast: Lapwing Publications, 2022; ISBN 978-1-7397938-8-3



Lucy Newlyn, former literary editor of this magazine, renowned scholar and teacher of (among other things) Romantic-period literature, came relatively late to writing poetry herself, her very fine debut collection *Ginnel* being published in 2005. Since then, her output has been prodigious and varied: *Earth's Almanac* (2015) was followed by the extraordinary ventriloquism of *Vital Stream* (2019), a brilliant sequence of poems in the voices of the Wordsworth circle, and her deft and useful *ars poetica*, *The Craft of Poetry* (2021). Her new collection, *Quicksilver*, may be her finest poetic achievement yet. Many of her abiding interests, including those canvassed in her memoir, *Diary of a Bipolar Explorer* (2018), come together here with new clarity, and in an abundance of forms, even as she refuses to settle for glib finality, as the collection's mercurial title signals. The poems here find words for the unspoken, forms for the intangible, while at times consciously resisting mere wordiness in favour of 'living phrases'.

The collection's first poem, 'Spirit', sounds a keynote: the voice here, haunted by grief, stresses that it has 'no single form', but that is not to reject form *per se*, rather to turn against the ossifications of language and Procrustean tendencies dominant in so many aspects of our lives, in which even our emotions are *managed* by predictable grids and narratives. Literary form, properly considered, refuses all of this: it has its eyes open (like the voice at the end of 'Sleep'), sees things anew. Newlyn's frequent use of the villanelle illustrates this very nicely: the repeated lines and phrases take on new meanings, even as they are haunted by their previous occurrences. In 'The Craft', for instance, the refrain 'I need a language such as lovers use', itself famously repeated and remotivated in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, serves as a way to escape from the hardening (in a number of senses) of language, and to get at the 'clues' provided by the outside world. In 'The Summer Turns', the voice of the season itself, reiterating 'leave I must', accretes layers of meaning as the leaves start to fall. 'Cells', perhaps the finest villanelle here, makes a more simple gesture. The poem, like several here addressing the odd temporal experience of COVID lockdowns, starts:

*Each in the cell of stillness, each alone,
we're linked by something far beyond our ken.
Let us touch gently now, not turn our hearts to stone.*

As the form dictates, the poem ends with a repetition of the first and third lines, now united rather than separated by the assertion of linkage in the second line, producing a gently forceful demonstration of its point. Lockdown is turned into a metaphor for the human condition more generally – the paradoxically shared isolation, in which each in the cell of himself is almost assured of his freedom.

That paradox also helps in thinking about one of the collection's other key emphases, on the common ownership of language. Newlyn has long worked on her poetry in workshops and online forums, showing creative generosity while energizing her own work, reflecting her fascination with the links between creativity and gift-economies, an issue reflected in her scholarly-critical work on the Wordsworth circle. Her poetic uses of allusion, then, are not just scaffolding as they might be in a less thoughtful writer, but serve to animate her thinking about other kinds of commons or commonalities, particularly the environment. Poets including Robert Frost, Edward Thomas, W.B. Yeats are *recycled* (Newlyn's own phrase) to remind us that we have gifts worth being grateful for, and that 'You are only passing through' ('The Muse Speaks').

As that last-mentioned poem suggests, it seems that writing *The Craft of Poetry* has given Newlyn's verse a new licence to speak with *authority*, something that's missing from a lot of contemporary poetry. When worn with light irony (like Auden at his best), as it is here, this remains an important literary resource, and it works particularly well as an offset to more tentative and haunting poems

such as 'Memory Moon'. The tentative and the authoritative voices are fused with great power in the anthologizable 'The Anthopocene', a mono-rhymed *tour de force*, concluding 'no end to the things that we don't know / and as for the planet, cheerio'.

There are new departures here too. The collection is capped by a long poem, Newlyn's version of *The Prelude*; her narrative of the 'growth of the poet's mind', 'Anima', uses an alienating third-person throughout, and seems at times as much an adaptation of the 'Lucy' poems as it is of the autobiographical epic. We are taken from Newlyn's childhood in Uganda through a haunting and haunted *Bildungsroman* of her personal and poetic career. The third-person also consistently keeps our eyes on the *feminine* aspect of experience, and a stress on the *incompletion* of the self, and this gives a new force to her allusions here, as she appropriates and reshapes the language of older male poets: for instance, at one point, like George Herbert, but for very different reasons, she wishes she were a tree. The poem, for all its power, has an avowed resemblance to a jigsaw puzzle—but the poet seems to wonder if things could be put together differently. The conclusion, drawing on 'A slumber did my spirit seal', is stunning:

*Her silent soul now wanders free,
diffused as particles of soil and air and rain,
a selfless spirit never to be trapped again.*

This is elegiac, as so many of the poems are here, and captures with real force the guilty freedom that is so often quietly felt as the work of grieving for the self and others gets, however provisionally, done.

TOM MACFAUL

CONTENTS

No. 447 Eighth Week Michaelmas Term 2022

Climate Emergency –mutually assured destruction BEN BOLLIG, TIM HORDER	1	Have you activated your membership of Congregation? G.R.EVANS	8
Pebble LOUISE WALKER	3	Possible ‘group litigation’: claims of £100m by 20,000 students DAVID PALFREYMAN	10
Flute Practice LOUISE WALKER	3	Why is an Oxford College’s name found in George Eliot’s ‘Middlemarch’? RICHARD BOYD	11
New moderate flank rising RUPERT READ	4	Neoliberalism ROGER BROWN	12
In Angel Square, Penrith KIERON WINN	5	Lucky Tom BERNARD RICHARDS	13
An engineer’s thoughts after COP27 ORESTIS ADAMIDIS	6	Speaking with authority TOM MACFAUL	16
12 YEARS OLD NIALl JAMES HOLOHAN	7		

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